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ABSTRACT

Using a Title VI Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, one faculty member at Valencia Community College (VCC) developed international or intercultural modules for existing courses to explore both Western and non-Western contributions to the humanities. During the first year of grant implementation, a module on Jewish and Islamic contributions to medieval European society and culture was developed for inclusion in a Late Roman-Medieval Humanities course. In the second year of the grant, two intercultural modules were designed for inclusion in an Introduction to Humanities course: "Afro-American Contributions to Literature" and "Native and Afro-American Contributions to Art, Architecture, and Music." These modules included comparisons of Greek tragic heroines to contemporary members of civil disobedience movements; a discussion of the work of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston; slide presentations of Meso-American pyramids and Native American handicrafts, and musical presentations of jazz. (JMC)

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Internationalizing the Curriculum: One Instructor's Experience.

by Lois L. McNamara

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Lois L. McNamara

INTERNATIONALIZING THE CURRICULUM: ONE INSTRUCTOR'S EXPERIENCE

In 1987, Valencia Community College received a U.S. Department of Education Title VI Grant for Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Programs. The grant that Valencia had written consisted of three components; one part funded the development of an International Horticultural Business Program; the second component provided assistance to area middle school teachers in developing international studies materials for geography courses; the third component invited college faculty to develop international or intercultural modules for existing courses. (A module was defined as teaching materials for three to six classes for an established course.) Faculty members who chose to develop such a module received a stipend at the completion of their work and a monetary allocation to purchase audio-visual or library materials for the modules they were developing.

I was happy to participate in the third component of this grant because I had been becoming steadily more convinced that our general education courses, including the Humanities courses I teach, were too Euro- or ethnocentric. I might add that I customarily began a course with an explanation of my conviction that important thinking and artistic achievements had taken place all over the world; I explained to my students that the people who decided on their general education requirements believed that our students should have a foundation of knowledge about western

civilization because that is the culture they live in. I assured them that when they go on to the university, there will be many courses available to them regarding the cultures of Africa, the Orient, and other nonwestern civilizations. Nevertheless, I felt uneasy because I know that by their omission I was sending a silent message that nonwestern achievements are either insignificant or nonexistent. Over the years, particularly as a result of my travels in Peru and Mexico, I had become convinced that the architectural, engineering, and astronomical achievements of the New World inhabitants were just as great, and in some cases greater, than the achievements of the Egyptians, Romans, and the Europeans who were my ancestors.

During the first year of our grant implementation (1987-88), I developed a module on Jewish and Islamic contributions to medieval European culture. This module was designed for inclusion in our Late Roman-Medieval Humanities course. Traditionally, this course had been taught in four units, with the first unit being one on the development of Christianity, followed by three units on medieval culture in Europe. In developing this teaching module, I added to the curriculum materials which showed aspects of the Jewish religion that Christianity had borrowed from Judaism; I also added to the curriculum for this course materials for teaching about the early development of Islam, as well as information on Jewish and Islamic contributions to medieval European society. For example, in the first unit I added readings from the Hebrew Bible to show the emphasis on ethics which Christianity borrowed from Judaism. In teaching about the early development of Islam, I

assigned readings from the Quoran and developed a set of slides to depict Islamic practices and holy sites in Mecca. Later in the course, I included a lecture on scientific and technological developments in the Arab world which were transmitted to Europe towards the end of the Middle Ages. Most students know the term Arabic numerals but have seldom credited this invaluable development to another culture. (Imagine doing long division in Roman numberals!) (Actually, the symbols known as Arabic numerals were derived from India, but Muslim scholars added the crucial concept of zero and transmitted this very useful knowledge to Europeans.) This module also included plans for teaching about Jewish life and thought in Europe during the Middle Ages. Students were required to read a selection from the writings of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who provides an interesting contrast with Aquinas or Abelard. Giving students biographical background on Maimonides provided an appropriate basis for informing students about the development of anti-Semitism in the Western world. As part of this module, I also prepared a set of slides to picture some of the oldest remaining European synogogues and visuals which depict evidence of anti-Semitism in medieval society.

In the second year of our grant, I developed two intercultural modules for our Introduction to Humanities course. This is a high enrollment course which introduces students to the various disciplines in the Humanities; many students take this course before going on to the other higher level Humanities courses. The course is taught with a textbook written by some of the veterans in my department. I had felt for some time that the course ought

to include more representation of minority contributions to the Humanities for two reasons. First of all, the Introduction to Humanities course generally includes more minority and international students than our other humanities courses. Wouldn't they, I reasoned, be more convinced of the value of college study if they saw that the contributions of their ethnic groups were valued as important? Secondly, I was personally convinced that majority students ought also to be better informed about the valuable achievements of nonwestern societies and artists or writers from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Thus, I developed for the Introduction to Humanities course two modules, titled "Afro-American Contributions to Literture" and "Native and Afro-American Contributions to Art, Architecture, and Music." Though these module titles may sound very comprehensive, please keep in mind that I was simply designing materials that could be incorporated into a pre-existing, successful course. Thus, in the literature module, I continued to use selections that were included in our textbook, but added some additional selections and emphasized connections to Americans of African or nonwestern descent. For instance, I continued to teach the Greek tragedy Antigone which our textbook included. But in discussing the themes of the play, I spent a day explaining the similarity of Antigone's stand to that taken by modern practictioners of civil disobedience. I tell the story of Rosa Parks in considerable detail; I elicit from students what they may know about the civil rights movement. This discussion also covers acts of civil disobedience by Ghandi, and majority Americans such as Thoreau and the Vietnam protestors

of the '60's.

The Literature Unit of our Introduction to Humanities textbook includes just one literary work by a Black author: the poem "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes. I customarily reproduce a few more poems of Hughes and spend an entire class period, eliciting the concerns and themes of Hughes in his poems. In explaining his poetry, I am given an opportunity to explain some lesser known aspects of American history, such as the Harlem Renaissance. Almost always, I can conclude this class with a profitable discussion of racism as students have evidenced it in their own lifetimes.

In rethinking this course, I felt strongly that more representation from Afro-American writers was desirable. I decided to field test a short story of Zora Neale Hurston, having chosen Hurston because she is the most famous writer to have originated in the Orlando area. I selected the story, "Isis," which is typical of Hurston's writings in that it relies heavily upon her accurate representation of the Black dialect. The story is about a delightfully mischieivous girl and is set in Eatonville, the all-Black city just north of Orlando, where Hurston grew up. This story paired very successfully with Frank O'Connor's "First Confession," which is included in our textbook. Both stories have child protagonists; both rely heavily upon dialect and setting for their effectiveness. In fact, Hurston's use of dialect is so extensive that students found it difficult to understand--until they heard it read aloud. My colleagues have asked me for my suggestions for their next revision of the textbook. I hope that

they will include this story or another by Hurston, as well as more poems by Hughes or other Afro-American writers.

My module on "Native and Afro-American Contributions to Art, Architecture and Music" included many easy-to-incorporate, minor additions. In the Architecture Unit, for instance, I simply included slides of Meso-American pyramids whereas the textbook had pictured only an Egyptian pyramid when discussing interior and exterior space. Though I continue to teach about the significance of the Roman arch and its architectural derivations, I also include slides of the corbelled arch as it was used in Mayan constructions. In teaching about ancient monolithic constructions such as Stonehenge (which our textbook discusses), I also include slides of the amazing Inca constructions at Cuzco and Machuu Pichu.

In a similar fashion, I added slides of the art works done by Native Americans to the art unit. Our textbook defines five purposes for art: education, illustration, decoration, entertainment and utility. A Greek urn and a vase by a modern American artist were depicted as representations of utilitarian art. Having a stipend of $600. to spend on materials for this module allowed me to purchase a considerable number of slides depicting native American pottery, baskets, and other utilitarian objects, dating from pre-Columbian times through the 1980's. I also selected a film about Maria Martinez, the well-known twentieth century Native American potter who developed the black-on-black pottery that is highly regarded and prized. This film demonstrates the traditional Indian pottery techniques of working from coils rather than a wheel; since many students have taken art classes in

which they made pots by both methods, they easily appreciate the skill of modern Indian potters who use the traditional techniques with such impressive results. The grant stipend also enabled me to purchase slides of art works by such contemporary native American artists as R.C. Gorman for inclusion when I teach about recent trends in the art world.

The music unit of our textbook presents a brief overview of the elements of music (melody, rhythm, and tonality), along with a cursory explanation of musical notation, and some examples of music in the Western tradition--from Brahms to the Beatles. Colleagues of mine generally built upon this material by placing music on a continuum of classical or romantic values, a presentation which has proven quite successful for a short unit on music. I extended the music unit for this course by adding two class sessions on jazz. In this area, in particular, I was able to make use of the materials stipend. I ordered a CD collection on the history of jazz, and after spending many hours viewing educational films and videos on jazz, I recommended the purchase of several films about jazz.

Teaching a brief overview of the history of jazz is particularly satisfying for communicating a sense of the fortuitious results when two societies merge and build upon each other; stated quite simply, jazz is a uniquely American art form that resulted from the blending of African rhythms with European tonality and musical instruments. What better way to indicate that different cultures can benefit from appreciating each other's achievements?

In conclusion, I am happy to have been involved in developing the Valencia international/intercultural modules. The most gratifying aspect of the project was having an allocation of money to spend on purchasing appropriate materials for teaching topics that I felt rightfully belonged in the courses. The module materials that I presented to my students have been well received; for instance, students are eager to learn about Islam, perhaps because of its relevance to current world affairs; some of my students have expressed astonishment and dismay when learning of anti-Semitism in the medieval world. On the other hand, it is a pleasure for me to note the expressions of South American students when I teach about the architectural wonders in their part of the world; and it is also rewarding to note the pride with which Afro-American students explain what Rosa Parks or other civil rights leaders did. I am also gratified by my colleagues' request for intercultural inclusions in their rewriting of the Introduction to Humanities textbook. It just goes to show, I think, that "doctoring" our courses to include the contributions of nonwestern cultures does pay off--for both instructor and students.

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